



## Introduction - SWG Strategic Framework and Core Functions

### Introduction

Since 1999 the European Union has launched the Stabilization and Association Process (SAP) covering South Eastern Europe (SEE), which has become better known as the Western Balkans (WB). Such step made the Western Balkan countries accession-driven, consistent with accession partnerships and adoption of the *acquis communautaire*. The SEE countries recognize the EU integration process as a structured framework that can facilitate their path towards the EU. Such development would provide a great opportunity to become part of a community of nations that aims to advance peace through economic, political and cultural co-operation between member states.

However, the EU integration process is a highly complex process, which involves the design and implementation of reforms in a wide range of areas. The region is characterized by differing levels of development and EU accession capacities, where several countries are EU Member States<sup>1</sup>, several have candidate status, and remainder are potential candidates.

Although all of the SEE countries are at different stages of development, they face similar challenges in modernizing of the agricultural and rural development sectors. Problems with policy reform and harmonization, information systems and economic development, coupled with general underdevelopment and limited institutional capacity, continue to obstruct the reform processes in the SEE.

## What is SWG?

The “SWG” stands for Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group in South East Europe (SEE).

It is an International Intergovernmental Organization consisted of governmental institutions responsible for agriculture and rural development in respective countries and territories.

As a platform for networking and regional co-operation the SWG has been established during the Agricultural Policy Forum 2005 (“Rural Development Opportunities for Co-operation in the SEE”) held in Macedonia and Serbia in June 2005. The SWG is acting as per the conclusions of the Leipzig Agricultural Policy Forum and the adopted Agenda 2004.

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The Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group (SWG) as evolved from being an informal network of institutions responsible for agriculture and rural development in South-Eastern Europe to an International Inter-governmental organization formalized in 2009 and made fully operational from January 2010.

It is a platform for networking and regional co - operation among the SEE countries and territories in the field of agriculture and rural development.

It was founded on the basis of a common wish to establish an organization for sustainable rural development in SEE. As an organization the SWG is an international body, acting in a spirit of friendship and good

neighborliness and enhances mutual respect and confidence, dialogue and cooperation among the Member Institutions.

### SWG bodies

SWG has four bodies:

- The Assembly
- The President of the SWG Assembly
- The Secretariat
- The General Secretary

The functioning of the SWG is divided between the SWG Assembly and the SWG Head Office/Secretariat. The SWG Head Office/Secretariat is entrusted to the Secretary General who oversees the SWG's organizational, administrative, coordinative and managerial tasks.

The tasks of the SWG Assembly include planning of initiatives and projects of SEE regional relevance which are in compliance with SWG principles and guidelines. The Secretariat's functions are to ensure that SWG's Strategic Objective is achieved with maximum efficiency and effectiveness and implements plans, initiatives and projects which are approved by the Assembly.

### Legal Act

The agreement on the status and activities of the SWG between the Government of the Republic of Macedonia as the SWG host country and the SWG was signed on 28 March 2009. The Agreement was ratified in the Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia on September 7th, 2009 and published in the Official Gazette no. 113 dated 11th September 2009. Its managing and coordinative body is the SWG Head Office/Secretariat, based in Skopje, Macedonia.

### **Vision**

Innovative and sustainable agriculture and rural development through cohesive regional co-operation for improvement of rural livelihoods in the SEE countries.

### **Mission**

To increase horizontal collaboration among respective countries and territories of SEE, coordinating regional initiatives related to agriculture and rural development and support the process of economic development in rural areas of Southeastern Europe.

### **General Objective**

To facilitate close cooperation among the Ministries of Agriculture and other stakeholders in the field of agriculture and rural development and to support the EU integration

### **Specific Objectives**

- To improve the common understanding of EU agriculture and rural development policies;
- To assist the improvement of implementation structures and systems for agriculture and rural development in rural areas, with specific emphasis on cross border cooperation;
- To improve the understanding and use of implementation tools for agriculture and rural development;
- To identify and share information and application of good practice in agriculture and rural development to broaden the rural agenda.

### **Functions**

Taking account of the scope of the objectives, SWG have both technical and political functions. Through projects and other types of managed processes, the technical role help to improve knowledge and information exchange and also improve the systems and tools for delivery of services to the sector. These technical functions also serve to feed the political role, through improved understanding and use of policy intervention tools to respond to better informed agricultural and rural stakeholders.

Consequently, the main functions of SWG, which derive from the needs and expectations expressed by Member Institutions and which are in line with the specific objectives, are:

1. Conducting and facilitating **policy analysis** and presentations
2. **Capacity building** of Member Institutions and other stakeholders
3. Identify and develop **tools for agriculture and rural development**
4. **Networking** to share experiences and **information** among Member Institutions
5. Identification and implementation of **regional projects** (as an operational function)

These main functions are reflected in the operational objectives of SWG incorporated into SWG Operational plan, therefore being part of the overall hierarchy of objectives.

### SWG Member institutions

#### SWG Members

Ministry of Agriculture Rural Development and Water Administration - Republic of Albania

Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Relations - Bosnia and Herzegovina

Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management - Republic of Srpska, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Water Management and Forestry - Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Ministry of Agriculture and Food – Republic of Bulgaria

Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy - Republic of Macedonia

Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development – Montenegro

Ministry of Agriculture and Environmental Protection – Republic of Serbia

Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Development – Kosovo\*

### **SWG Observers**

Ministry of Agriculture - Republic of Croatia

Provincial Secretariat of Agriculture Water Management and Forestry -  
*Autonomous Province of Vojvodina* – Republic of Serbia

Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water  
Management – Federal Republic of Austria

Federal Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Consumer Protection – Federal  
Republic of Germany

Ministry of Rural Development – Republic of Hungary

Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food – Republic of Slovenia

Ministry of Agricultural, Food and Forestry Policies – Republic of Italy

\*This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.